Low Temperature Blanket

By KUNIEDA SAIKA

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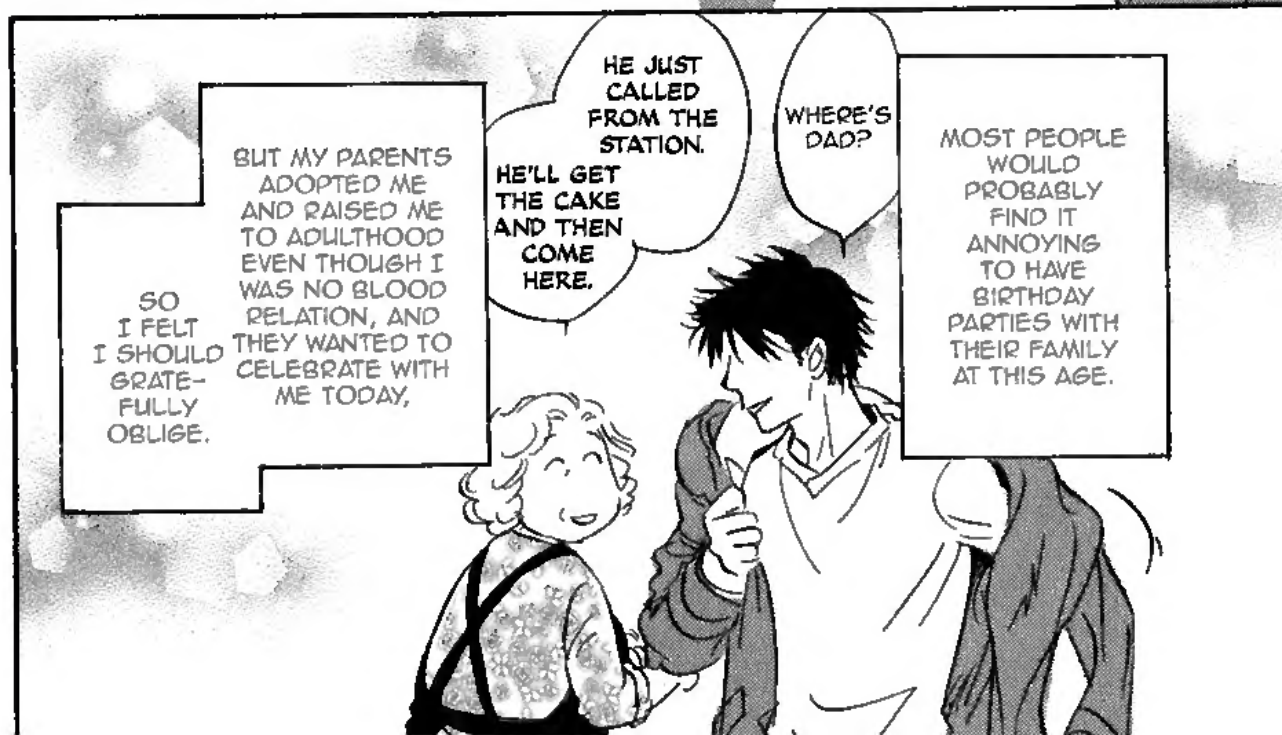
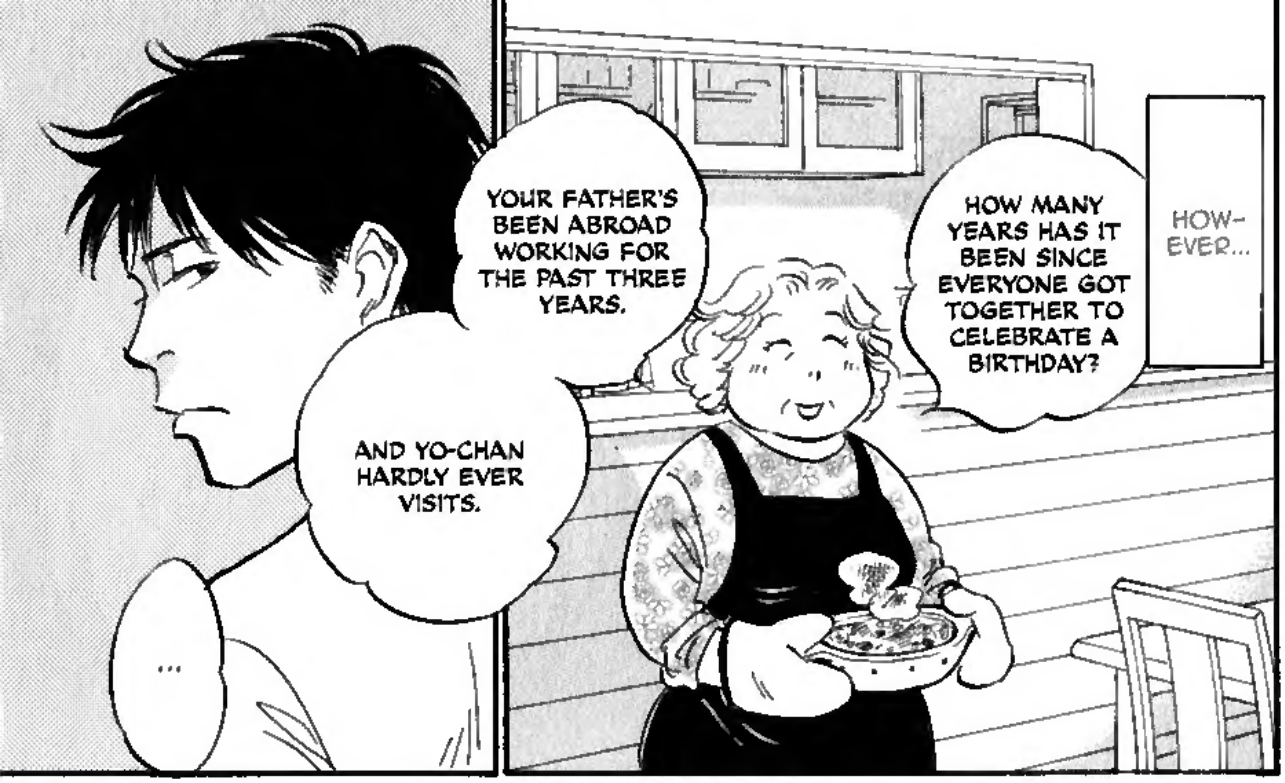
IT SHOULDN'T MATTER NOW.
IT'S BEEN TWO YEARS SINCE WE LAST MET. I EVEN HAD A GIRLFRIEND IN UNIVERSITY.
MORE IMPORTANTLY, I'M NOT THE SAME NAIVE YOUNGSTER I WAS BACK THEN.
OH! DAI-CHAN! WELCOME BACK.
ARE YOU WELL?

COME ON, HURRY UP AND COME INSIDE.
OH~ STOP THAT! YOU NEEDN'T BE SO POLITE.
THANK YOU FOR DOING THIS FOR ME,
MUM.
YES.
TODAY IS MY 20TH BIRTHDAY.
FAMILY GATHERINGS ARE RARE FOR US, BUT EVERYONE'S HERE TODAY.


HE JUST CALLED FROM THE STATION.
HE'LL GET THE CAKE AND THEN COME HERE.
WHERE'S DAD?
MOST PEOPLE WOULD PROBABLY FIND IT ANNOYING TO HAVE BIRTHDAY PARTIES WITH THEIR FAMILY AT THIS AGE.
BUT MY PARENTS ADOPTED ME AND RAISED ME TO ADULTHOOD EVEN THOUGH I WAS NO BLOOD RELATION, AND THEY WANTED TO CELEBRATE WITH ME TODAY,
SO I FELT I SHOULD GRATE-FULLY OBLIGE.


HOW-EVER...
HOW MANY YEARS HAS IT BEEN SINCE EVERYONE GOT TOGETHER TO CELEBRATE A BIRTHDAY?
YOUR FATHER'S BEEN ABROAD WORKING FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS.
AND YO-CHAN HARDLY EVER VISITS.
...

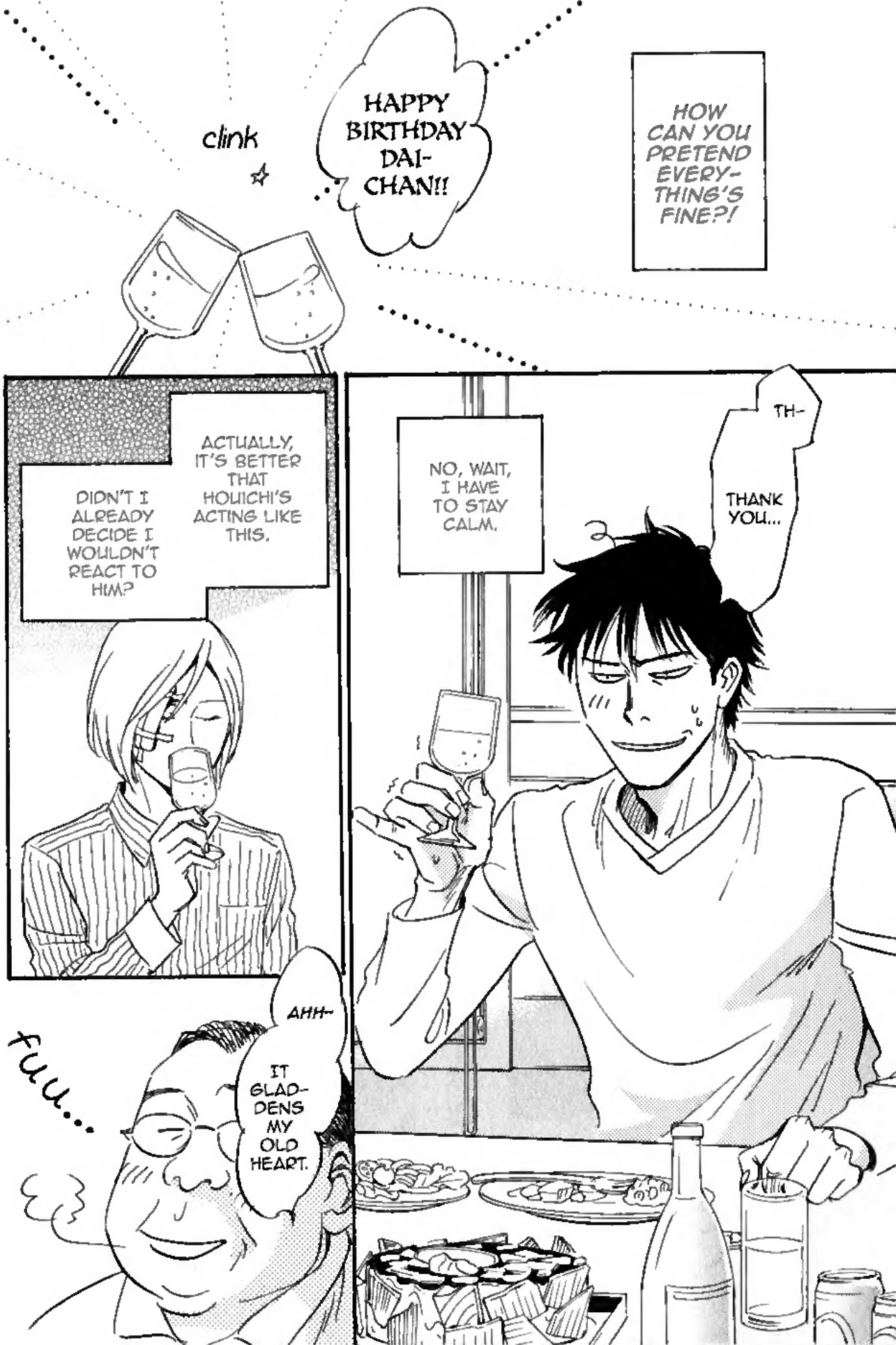
I MADE A DECISION TO KEEP MY DISTANCE FROM HIM.
ding!
dong!
YO-CHAN IS MUM'S YOUNGER BROTHER. HIS FULL NAME IS YOSHIKAZU.
Urm...
Yoshi... kazu... Is he coming as well today?
HUH?
WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO YOU DAI-CHAN?
OH!
SPEAK OF THE DEVIL!
THAT'S RIGHT ...
UM...
ERR...
WHY IS IT "YOSHIKAZU" ALL OF A SUDDEN?
DIDN'T YOU ALWAYS USE TO CALL HIM "HOUICHI"?
You shouldn't be so distant, you know!

Houichi ?!
Hi.
YO-CHAN?!

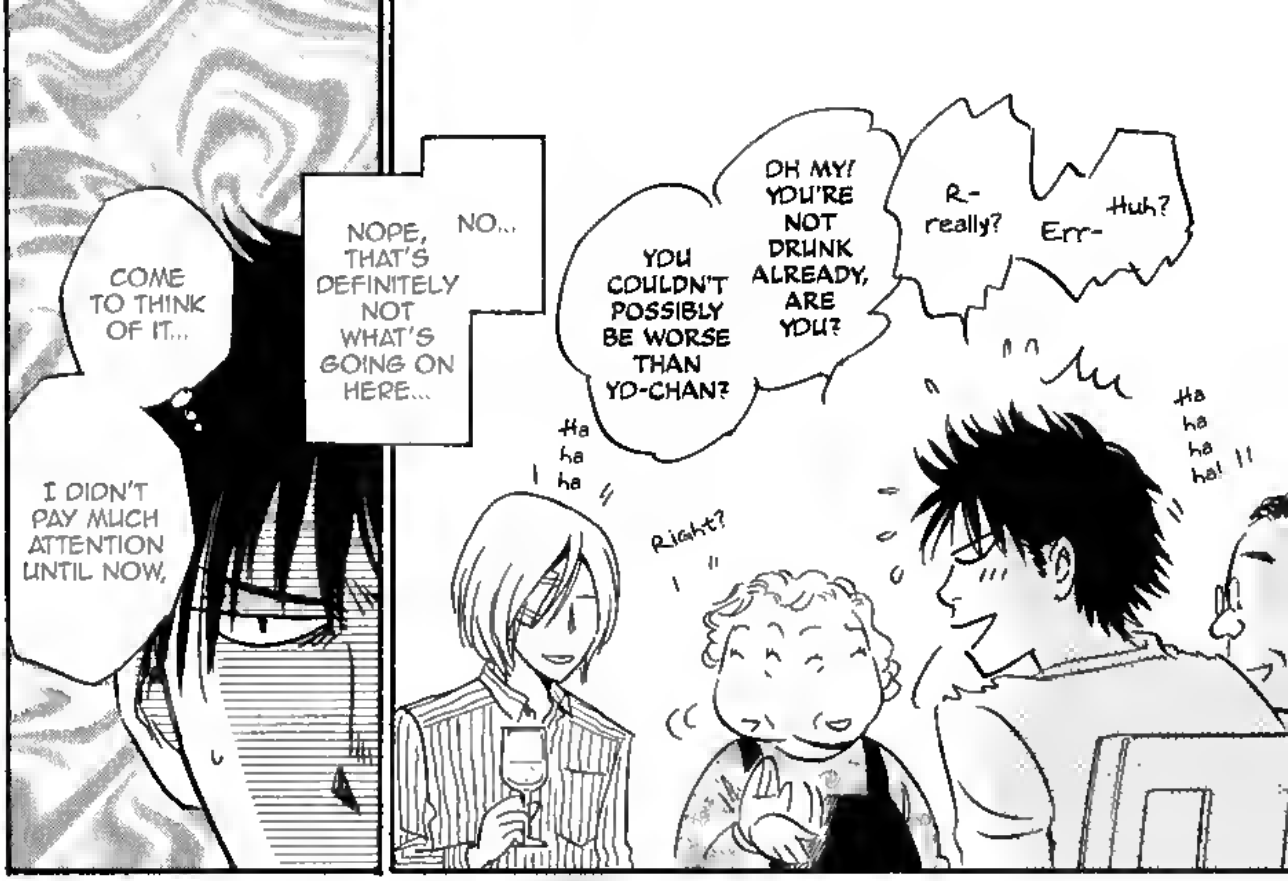
What the hell happened to your face?!
OH, I FELL DOWN.
EXACTLY HOW DID YOU FALL TO GIVE YOU A FACE LIKE THAT?!
WELL, IT WENT LIKE THIS...
I WAS WALKING AROUND THE LIBRARY LOOKING FOR A BOOK,
AND I BUMPED INTO A BOOK THAT WAS STICKING OUT.
THAT CAUSED A WHOLE BUNCH OF OTHER BOOKS TO FALL DOWN.
I TRIED TO AVOID THEM... WHICH ONLY LED TO ME FALLING DOWN AS WELL...
.....
Strictly speaking though...
This injury is just from that first book scratching my eyelid.
...HONESTLY!
fuu~
YOU'VE GOT TO TAKE MORE CARE, OK?
YOU CAN BE A LITTLE SCATTER-BRAINED SOMETIMES.
Alright, let me see.
OK.
sister complex
THIS GOES FAR BEYOND THE LEVEL OF "A LITTLE" ...

I'VE GOTTA KEEP HIM AT A DISTANCE TODAY...
OH, WHAT'S THIS?
A GIFT.
Calm down, just calm down...
OH NO!
NOT GOOD! NOT GOOD!
I CAN'T LET MYSELF GET DRAGGED ALONG BY HOUICHI'S PACE!
fwip
fwip
WHAT HAPPENED YO-CHAN? YOU'VE BECOME SO THOUGHTFUL ALL OF A SUDDEN.
Forgive me for being so inattentive until now.
AH, WELL...
WHEN I SAID IT'S MY NEPHEW'S 20TH BIRTHDAY TODAY,
WHAT ?!
CHAM-PAGNE.
AND JUST WHO IS "THEY" ?
THEY SAID "IN THAT CASE, YOU'D BETTER TAKE THIS AS A PRESENT ...
OH?

IS IT THAT GUY?
THAT ANNOYING OLD GEEZER?
...
NO NO NO! THIS HAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH ME!!!
NO, NOTHING LIKE THAT.
YO-CHAN, DID YOU GET A GIRL-FRIEND?!
OH I SEE!
OH!
Did you?
WAH!
turn
WELL THEN...
calm
I WISH YOU A HAPPY BIRTHDAY,
OAI-SUKE.
...
WHAT'S GOING ON?!


clink
HAPPY BIRTHDAY DAI-CHAN!!
HOW CAN YOU PRETEND EVERY-THING'S FINE?!
DIDN'T I ALREADY DECIDE I WOULDN'T REACT TO HIM?
ACTUALLY, IT'S BETTER THAT HOUICHI'S ACTING LIKE THIS.
NO, WAIT, I HAVE TO STAY CALM.
TH-
THANK YOU...
FUU...
AHH-
IT GLAD-DENS MY OLD HEART.

THERE'S NO WAY I CAN LET THOSE TWO FIND OUT...
There's still a lot of food.
Yo-chan, your capacity for alcohol isn't great either. Don't drink too much, ok?
Ok
HONESTLY! YOU CAN'T HOLD YOUR LIQUOR BUT YOU STILL INSIST ON DRINKING.
IT'S ALWAYS BEEN MY DREAM TO HAVE A DRINK WITH MY SONS.
Especially this kind of trendy champagne!
ABOUT THAT NIGHT...
blush
OH? DAISUKE, YOUR FACE IS ALL RED!

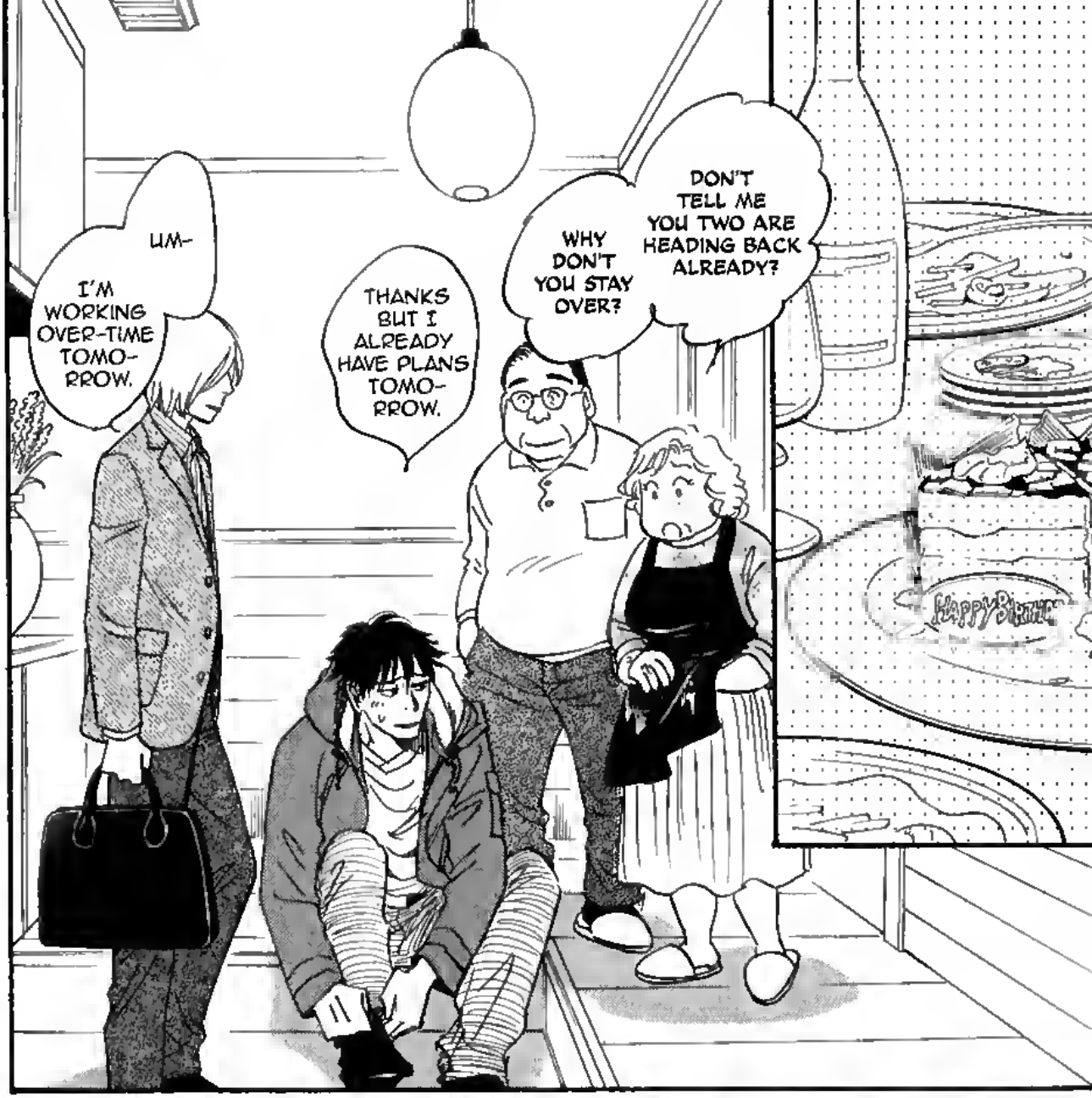

I DIDN'T PAY MUCH ATTENTION UNTIL NOW,
COME TO THINK OF IT...
NOPE, THAT'S DEFINITELY NOT WHAT'S GOING ON HERE...
NO...
YOU COULDN'T POSSIBLY BE WORSE THAN YD-CHAN?
OH MY! YOU'RE NOT DRUNK ALREADY, ARE YOU?
R-really?
Err-
Huh?
Ha ha ha
Right?
Ha ha ha ha!!

HE NEVER OWNED ANYTHING LIKE THIS EXPENSIVE LOOKING SHIRT AND THAT DESIGNER SUIT JACKET, DID HE?
BEFORE, HE USED TO JUST THROW ON SOMETHING CHEAP
BUT HOUICHI SEEMS DIFFERENT SOMEHOW, LIKE HE'S TAKEN MORE CARE WITH HIS APPEARANCE?
Alright
How is it Kazu-kun? Have another glass!

WHAT THE HELL ?!
Damn, that was loud!
Gah!
NOPE! THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ME! HOUICHI'S FREE TO DATE IF HE WANTS...
Stay cool, stay cool.
I KNOW WHAT'S UP.
THERE'S ONLY ONE POSSIBLE EXPLANATION, HE'S GOTTA BE DATING SOMEONE!
sneaking away
Ah- no, actually it's a call...
COME ON, JUST REPLY TO IT AT THE TABLE, IT'S ONLY A TEXT AFTER ALL.
Uh- no, it's
OOH! IS IT YOUR GIIIIIRL-FRIEND?
HUH?
TONIGHT? RIGHT NOW?
I'M AT MY PARENT'S HOUSE.
UM- KAORI?
QUIT JOKING AROUND!
IF ONLY HE'D BROUGHT HIS GIRLFRIEND AS WELL TODAY.
AHH, IT MUST BE PUPPY LOVE.

KAORI AND I STARTED DATING AT THE BEGINNING OF SPRING.
I'm Kaori!
How many times do I have to tell you?
...
THAT'S WHY I SAID I'D SPEND THE WHOLE DAY WITH YOU TOMO-RROW.
YEAH...
OK...
I thought I already told you yesterday?
NO, IT'LL BE TOO LATE TONIGHT.
SOME-TIMES, SHE CAN BE A LITTLE TIRING.
Fuu...
WHAAAT? YOU'RE HAVING A BIRTHDAY PARTY WITH YOUR FAMILY?
ISN'T THAT FOR KIDS?
Surely your girlfriend should take priority?
I THINK IT'S GREAT THAT SHE SPEAKS HER MIND FREELY.
ONLY...
KAORI IS CUTE AND CHEER-FUL.
JOLT!
Hey! It's definitely a wig!
THEN HURRY UP AND TELL ME "I LOVE YOU THE BEST.♡"!
I- L- love.. cough cough
O- of course.
DAISUKE, DO YOU REALLY LOVE ME?

I JUST WANTED TO GO TO THE TOILET.
NO,
Are you eaves-dropping?!
What the hell?!
wha-
!oom
GYAH!
...
WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME? GETTING WORKED UP OVER NOTHING.
GRRR
Click !!
OH.
THANK YOU.
... PLEASE.
JUST NOW, MY LINE OF SIGHT WAS ANGLED DOWN-WARDS.
FINALLY! I'M TALLER THAN HOUICHI!
NO NO NO! HE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ME!
shake
shake


UM-
I'M WORKING OVER-TIME TOMO-RROW.
THANKS BUT I ALREADY HAVE PLANS TOMO-RROW.
WHY DON'T YOU STAY OVER?
DON'T TELL ME YOU TWO ARE HEADING BACK ALREADY?
HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Hahaa...
OH!
BRING YOUR GIRLFRIEND NEXT TIME, OK?
YOU TWO TAKE CARE OF YOUR SELVES

glance
...
I CAN'T HELP FEELING LIKE THERE'S A STRANGE ATMOS-PHERE...

WHAT'S THERE TO BE SO HAPPY ABOUT?
NO! WHAT AM I THINKING?!
SO WHAT IF I MANAGED TO CATCH HIM UP IN HEIGHT? IT CHANGES NOTHING!
step
step
step
YUP!
JUST AS I THOUGHT; I'M TALLER THAN HIM.
AWE-SOME!
Exactly 180cm
IN THE END THE ONLY ONE LEFT IN A MUDDLE IS ME.
DAMMIT

WHOOSH
EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER, I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO CATCH UP TO HOUICHI.
JOG
RIGHT,
NOT JUST IN HEIGHT,
INTELLIGENCE, PHYSICAL STRENGTH, IT DIDN'T MATTER WHAT IT WAS, I WANTED TO SURPASS HIM IN EVERYTHING,
SO THAT I COULD PROTECT THIS OLDER, YET COMPLETELY UNRELIABLE, UNCLE OF MINE...
fuuu...
BANG
NOW THAT I THINK OF IT, WHAT A JOKE...

...GAH!
drip
drip
HE-
HEY? HOUICHI?
ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
OOH...
UGH...

DAZE
...I SPACED OUT FOR A SECOND.
.....
FOR THE LOVE OF-!
WHAT IS *WRONG* WITH THIS GUY?!
I'LL DROP YOU OFF!
HEY, AREN'T YOU GOING THE OTHER WAY?
HUH? BUT...
IT'S FINE!

tissue
IF I LET YOU GO BACK ALONE LOOKING LIKE THAT, MUM'LL HAVE A GO AT ME.
RATTLE
RATTLE
RATTLE
Trying hard to emit telepathic messages.
It's not what you're thinking ladies and gents.
It's not like that!
THIS MUST LOOK AS IF I BEAT HIM UP...
DAMN IT!

...NO WAIT,
I DID HIT HOUICHI ONCE.
Though it was only a slap
HE LIKED ME ENOUGH TO SLEEP WITH ME...
OR SO I THOU-GHT.
BUT IT TURNED OUT HOUICHI DIDN'T LIKE ME LIKE THAT AT ALL.
IN THAT MOMENT, I THOUGHT HE WAS JUST PLAYING WITH ME...
IN MY ANGER I...

MY ATTITUDE TOWARDS HIM WAS TERRIBLE.

GETTING THAT FEELING FROM HIM, I GOT MORE AND MORE IRRITABLE.

SEEING HIM BEHAVE AS IF HE WERE WOUNDED, ONLY MADE ME FEEL HE DESERVED IT...

AFTER THAT, HOUICHI SEEMED...

TO BE AFRAID OF ME.

I GOT INTO UNIVERSITY AND FOUND A NEW FLAT TO LIVE IN. WHEN I LEFT HOUICHI'S PLACE, I REMEMBER BREATHING A DEEP SIGH OF RELIEF.

REMEMBERING IT NOW, I WAS DESPICABLE...

THAT HOUICHI HAD BEEN MISTREATED WHEN HE WAS A CHILD.

AFTER THAT,

WHEN I GOT USED TO LIVING BY MYSELF, I SUDDENLY REMEMBERED...

BUT STILL, I DID SOMETHING I SHOULDN'T HAVE.

I DIDN'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT KIND OF ABUSE HE'D SUFFERED,

AND I NEVER GOT THE CHANCE TO APOLOGIZE, UNTIL NOW.

I WONDER IF HOUICHI IS STILL AFRAID OF ME?

peek

huff~
quiet...
HE'S THE SAME AS EVER, YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT HE'S THINKING...
drip
HUH?
I think you can throw away that tissue now.
Ah-

WE NEED AN UMBRELLA.
IT'S NOT THAT BAD YET.
BESIDES, WE ALREADY PASSED THE CONVENIENCE STORE.
I SEE...
IT'S RAINING?
WHAT THE HELL? THE WEATHER FORECAST DIDN'T MENTION RAIN.
YUP. LOOKS LIKE IT.
FWOOSH
?
drip
drop
...
drip
drop
drip
drop
f u
STOP

USE THIS, OK?
AT THE VERY LEAST, IT'LL HOLD OFF SOME OF THE RAIN.
...HA?
WH-WHAT?
DRAPE
WAH!
HURRY UP!
BEFORE THE RAIN GETS ANY WORSE.
IT DOESN'T MATTER. YOU'RE INJURED, SO JUST DO AS I SAY!
NOW, YOU'LL GET WET.
BUT,
OH.

JOLT
ER-
UM-
I...
GUESS?
...
DAISUKE,
DO YOU TREAT YOUR GIRLFRIEND LIKE THIS TOO?
I SEE...
TO BE HONEST, KAORI AND I HAVE NEVER BEEN IN THIS KIND OF SITUATION.
AT ANY RATE, SHE'S NOT THE KIND OF PERSON THAT NEEDS LOOKING AFTER LIKE HOUICHI...
DO YOU LIKE HER...?

O-
OF COURSE...
...I LIKE HER?
WHY ARE YOU ASKING THAT ALL OF A SUDDEN?
OH. I SEE.
THAT'S GOOD.

.....
THIS...
IT'S GREAT,
THAT YOU CAN DATE SOMEONE YOU LIKE.

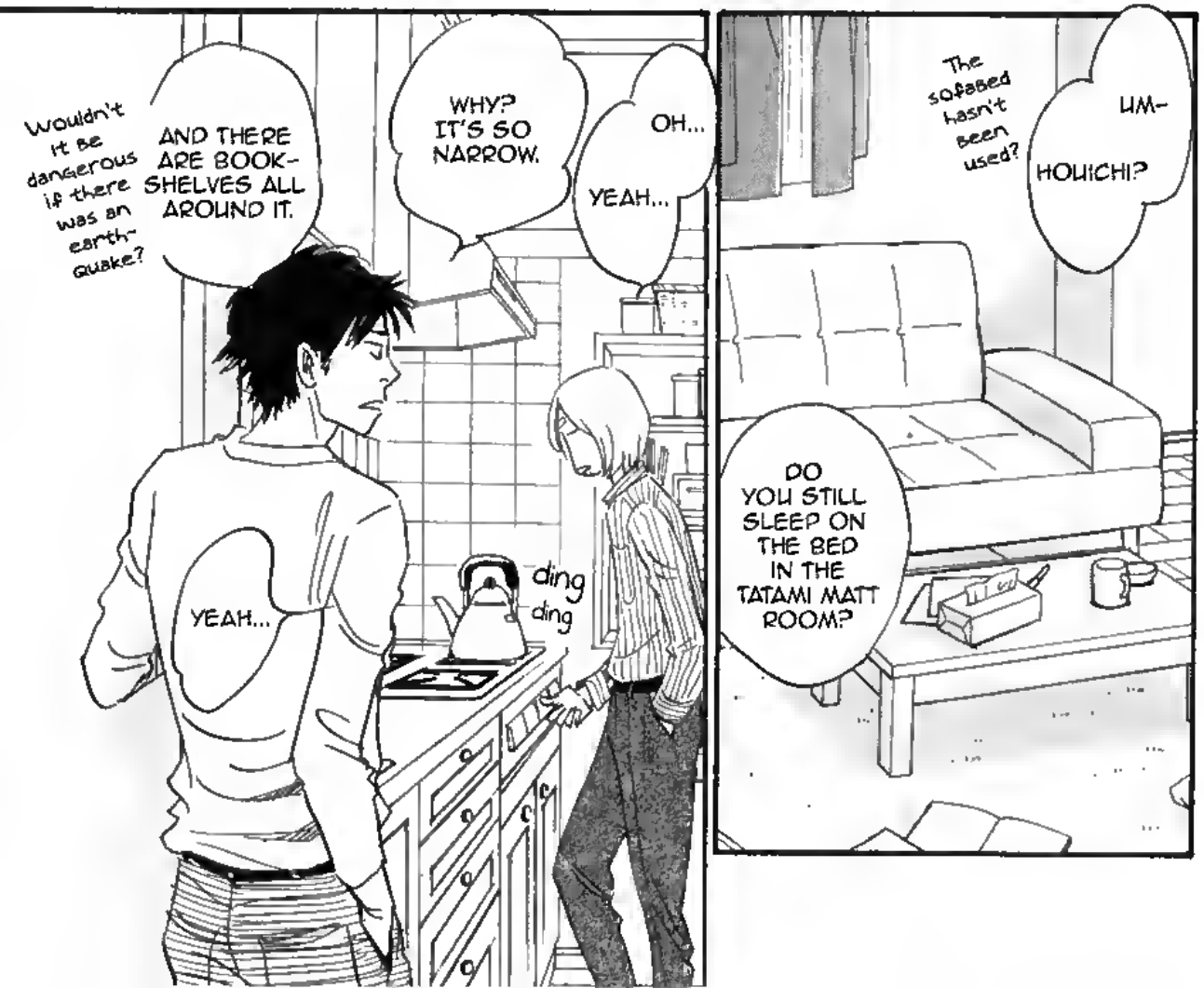
zaaa...
HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO FIGURE OUT THE MEANING BEHIND HIS WORDS?
OH.
THE RAIN GOT WORSE.
DAISUKE, COME UNDER THE JACKET WITH ME.
COME ON.
...
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT HIS INTENTIONS ARE...
NO...
zaaa
MAYBE HE DOESN'T HAVE ANY PARTICULAR INTENTIONS AT ALL...
...
HOUICHI, YOU... UM-
YES?
ARE YOU DATING ANYONE?
...
ack!
ARE YOU ASKING IF THERE'S ANYONE I'M HAVING SEX WITH?
YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED A BIT, BLUNT AS EVER..
um... er... I... guess...

ONE TIME WE GOT CLOSE TO HAVING THAT KIND OF RELATION-SHIP...
I KNEW IT!
That lecher definitely has his eyes on you!
I THINK... NOT?
PROB-ABLY.
PROB-ABLY? WHAT THE HELL DOES THAT MEAN?!
I can't pretend I didn't hear that!
WELL... YOU STILL REMEMBER KUROSAWA-SAN?
Enjoys Peking duck
That old geezer?!
So he's the one, huh?
ACTUALLY, THAT TIME IT WAS ME WHO INITIATED IT
WHAT?
...YOU LIKE THAT GUY?
HOU-ICHI,
NO, I DON'T LIKE HIM LIKE THAT.
THEN WHY?!
I just don't get it!!
Of course I don't dislike him either

...
...WHAT?
HMM...
MAYBE,
BECAUSE YOU GOT ANGRY THAT TIME...
YOU REMEMBER?
THAT TIME WHEN YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO HAVE SEX WITH ME.
OK, OK, I GET IT, YOU DON'T NEED TO EXPLAIN!
IT WASN'T LIKE THAT!!
THEN I GOT HARD, SO YOU GOT ANGRY..
I GOT ANGRY BECAUSE YOU SAID "I CAN'T GET HARD IF IT'S WITH SOMEONE I LIKE."!
OH YES, THAT'S RIGHT.

gaze
AND THEN...?
...
DAISUKE,
ba-dump!
...
I THOUGHT; "WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE WITH SOMEONE ELSE?"
AND THEN,
WOW...
WE'RE HERE
WANNA COME INSIDE?
...

IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I WAS HERE...
WANT SOME COFFEE?
I ONLY HAVE INSTANT.
HUH?
OH, THAT'S FINE!
Speaking of, can you even make coffee?
He's changed. He's so polite now.


UM- HOUICHI?
The sofabed hasn't been used?
DO YOU STILL SLEEP ON THE BED IN THE TATAMI MATT ROOM?
OH... YEAH...
WHY? IT'S SO NARROW.
AND THERE ARE BOOK-SHELVES ALL AROUND IT.
Wouldn't it be dangerous if there was an earth-quake?
YEAH...
ding ding

I KEEP THINKING YOU'LL COME BACK ONE DAY...
Subconsciously I keep thinking that
BECAUSE ...

THEN HE SAID, "DON'T FORCE YOURSELF."
KUROSAWA -SAN AND I WENT TO BED, BUT I COULDN'T GET HARD.
...JUST NOW,
OH! GOING BACK TO WHAT I WAS SAYING,
I FELT LIKE A SWITCH INSIDE ME WAS TURNED ON.

AFTER THAT, OUR RELATION-SHIP WENT BACK TO JUST BEING BOSS AND EMPLOYEE...
HUH?
DAI...

...
...AND THEN?

THAT SO?
WE WOULD JUST MEET OCCASIONALLY TO EAT OR GO SHOPPING...
OH, ERR...
AFTER YOU WENT BACK TO BEING BOSS AND EMPLOYEE?
WHAT?
JUST NOW, DID YOU KISS ME?
YEAH.
WAIT, DAISUKE,
ISN'T IT OBVIOUS?
WH-WHY...?

BUT,
YOU HAVE A GIRL-FRIEND.
YEAH.
I'LL BREAK UP WITH HER TOMO-RROW.
TO TELL THE TRUTH, I ALWAYS KNEW.
BECAUSE I LIKE YOU.

HOUICHI WOULD ONLY NEED TO BE STANDING BEFORE ME AND I WOULD FALL APART.
NO MATTER HOW MANY YEARS PASSED,
NO MATTER HOW MUCH I PRETENDED I DIDN'T CARE,
GOING BACK FOR MY BIRTHDAY,
TAKING HOUICHI HOME,
IT WAS ALL SO I COULD SEE HOUICHI, SO I COULD BE WITH HIM.
I TURNED ON THE SWITCH THAT NEEDED TO BE TURNED ON.
AND NOW, IT CAN NEVER BE TURNED OFF AGAIN.
NO-ONE CAN STOP ME.

REALIZING I WAS A LITTLE TALLER THAN HIM WAS ALL THE PUSH I NEEDED.
THIS TIME I'VE DECIDED; HE'S MINE,
AND,
I'LL NEVER LOSE HIM AGAIN.

DAISUKE&HOICHI

LOW TEMPERATURE BLANKET
低温ブランケット